

Democratic Russian Roulette

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It is inevitable to speak about Greece today. There is a generalized feeling of astonishment about the Greek government's decision to hold a referendum on the Eurogroup's second-to-last offer laid down on Thursday. The astonishment has basically two strands: some say it is economic and political suicide for Greece; some say it is the most dignified way out for the Greek people (and its government).

I am personally not astonished. I am enraged.

To be honest, I thought Syriza's government would bring along a fresh look at EU politics and a new and positive ideological counterweight in Council meetings, but I am afraid it has not: all it has done is prove to be just another shortsighted and mediocre political party (one more among many). And in all its mediocrity and shortsightedness, it has created, willingly or not, a new and lethal game: democratic russian roulette.

We are all rather familiar with Germany's financial efforts and the Bundestag's painful decisions on each Greek rescue programme. However, not much has been said about, for example, the Spanish contribution to the Greek rescue programmes. You probably are unaware that Spain, in the midst of its worse economic crisis in decades, with almost six million unemployed and in deep recession, went to the bond markets to look for no less than 26.000 million euros, as part of its contribution to the Greek rescue programmes. Because Spain was at that time (2011, 2012, 2013...) in a dubious financial state, this means that Spaniards paid (and keep paying) for those contributions an interest rate that is considerably higher than the one paid by Germany, Finland or the Netherlands. In other words: Spaniards might contribute quantitatively less, but the effort has been considerably more expensive for them than for the nationals of countries that happened to be in much better financial shape at the time.

Nobody ever asked the Spanish people if they wished to contribute to such a programme. It was never put to a vote in Parliament. However, nobody really cared about voting. Spaniards were told we should help the Greek people, and everyone, I mean everyone, thought it was the right thing to do.

So now we have a Greek government claiming it is unwilling to commit to its obligations under the last rescue programme. And to prove itself right, it decides to hold a confusing referendum about something it actually is not: the Greeks will have to vote on a proposal made by the Eurogroup that improves the conditions of the last assistance programme, although everybody knows that the vote will not really concern the programme. In fact, the referendum is about whether Greece keeps paying its debts and whether it stays in or out of the Eurozone. This is not what you will read in the question being put to the Greek people next Sunday, but it doesn't really matter, right? It is all about democracy and the dignity of the Greek people.

If Syriza's gamble is really about democracy, then I have an objection to make: how about the 26.000 million euros the Spanish people invested in Greece's future? Are we, Spaniards, entitled to have a say, or are we just selfish and criminal creditors, unconcerned about the people of Greece and deserving to rot in hell? And if this is really about democracy, shouldn't I have a say in this too? Why is this about the dignity of the Greek people and not about the dignity of the other peoples of Europe? Although the discourse of the Syriza government puts its emphasis on solidarity and dignity... what about the solidarity and dignity of countries that committed themselves to help the Greek people in times of difficulty? Don't they deserve dignity and solidarity too?

In fact, if we all start complaining about our individual national dignities and our individual degrees of solidarity, doesn't this discourse take us simply nowhere? Can you see how lethal this can be?

In my opinion, we are facing cheap politics. Cheap politicians playing cheap politics, but holding in their hands the future of millions of Greeks. Syriza is not fighting for the dignity of the Greek people, it is fighting to save its own ass.

If Syriza's government realized that its demands had run out of political fuel, either because its Eurozone

partners at the negotiating table were not buying them, or because the Greek Parliament would never vote them, its duty was to call an election (democracy, right?). But its duty was definitely not to hold a confusing referendum that will only drive Greece down a painful road of loss and uncertainty.

Democracy is about self-government and responsibility, not about blame-games and easy scapegoats. By holding this ludicrous referendum, the Greek government has put a gun in the head of the Greek people and asked them to pull the trigger. To make things worse, it is campaigning so that they pull the trigger.

This is not democracy at its best. This is democratic russian roulette, just as deadly as the original, but way much more irresponsible.

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